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ABSTRACT

In addition to a profile of, and open-ended responses from, 174 educators subject to reduction in force (RIF) and 273 educators who had not been RIFFED, this study presents findings from a questionnaire showing the level of stress produced over a 12-month period by 38 factors. A t-test determined the significance of the differences between the groups' mean scores for individual stress factors. The profile of RIFFED educators examined sex and age, level of academic preparation, teaching experience, number of times RIFFED and tenure status, type of educational employment, income and dependent status, second jobs held, post-RIF employment, date of rehire and assignment, and job satisfaction. The questionnaire showed major shifts in educators' concerns after being RIFFED: factors such as "paperwork" or "committee assignments" became less stressful than "lack of job security" or "lack of control over own life/future." The open-ended responses revealed educators' feelings of being dehumanized, undervalued, and unappreciated. The study urges those responsible for issuing RIF notices to be aware of the personal-professional effect the notices have on recipients. Tables provide a list of major emphases in 19 articles on RIFs (listed in the bibliography) and a ranking of the 38 stress factors. (PB)

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Characteristics and Stress Producing Factors in a Population of RIFFED Educators

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Characteristics and Stress Producing Factors of a Population of RIFFED Educators

Distribution of reduction in force (RIF) notices has become a springtime ritual in many of the nation's public school districts (Divoky, 1979). Each year the number of districts that send RIF notices to all of their non-tenured employees and part of their tenured employees increases. Many of those who receive these notices have been RIFFED and rehired by the same district during several previous years.

Insert Table I at about this point

An examination of the nineteen professional articles and papers listed in Table I reveals that their content falls into three areas of emphasis. Major emphasis in 11 of the 16 articles is on the legal aspects involved in RIFFING teachers. These articles contain major sections which discuss statuatory considerations that are involved in keeping boards of education and school administrators in a legally defensible position. The development and implementation of policies and procedures for use in carrying out a RIF are emphasized in portions of 16 of the 19 articles. These sections discuss establishment of seniority lists, public relations, and strategies for reducing the number of employees such as early retirement and liberalization of leave without pay policies. Only three of the 19 articles contain sections which discuss the effect being RIFFED has on the person who receives notice. These articles

discuss factors such as the high anxiety, demoralization and long-range effects on morale that accompanies the receipt of a RIF notice.

Little is written that describes the characteristics of the population that receives RIF notices, what happens to them after they receive notices, or the factors they find to be most stress producing. This study was designed to answer the following questions about a population of educators who had been RIFFED the previous spring.

1. What were the characteristics of the population that received notices (e.g., sex, age, level of academic preparation, amount of teaching experience, tenure status, type of positions held, etc.)?
2. What were the characteristics of the population that received those who received notice?
3. What type and location of employment did the notice recipients engage in during the year following the RIF?
4. How satisfied were the notice recipients with their choice of a career in education and would they select the same career again?
5. What factors did those who had been RIFFED find to be most stress producing during the previous 12 months?
6. How does the level of stress on specific factors reported by those who have been RIFFED compare with that reported by those who have not been RIFFED?

METHOD

The data for this study was gathered by a questionnaire that was completed by 174 educators who had been RIFFED and 273 who had not been RIFFED. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the suggestion that each of a list of 38 factors had been stress producing for them during the previous 12 months. The five choices included, "strongly agree," "agree," "no opinion," "disagree" and "strongly disagree." A *t*-test was used to determine the significance of the difference of the means of the two groups on each of the stress factors.

Findings

Sex and Age of RIFFED Education

Females made up 82% of the population which returned completed questionnaires. Twenty-six percent of these females were age 41 or above when they were RIFFED. Examination of their comments at the end of the instrument revealed that several members of this group had recently returned to teaching after resigning tenured positions to give birth to children and to care for them during their preschool years. One member of the female respondents had recently moved to Arizona with her husband who had been transferred to the state. She reported that she had a total of 14 years of previous experience and that she had been tenured in two different districts prior to her husband's last transfer.

Educators who were age 30 and over made up 59% of those who were RIFFED. Over one-half of the males studied were in their thirties. An

additional 11.5% of the males were age 41 or older.

Level of Academic Preparation

Masters degrees or an equivalent number of semester hours of post-bachelors degree level coursework had been completed by 41% of the females and 54% of the males. Two-thirds of those who received notices are bachelors degree holders who have completed more than 15 hours of additional coursework.

Amount of Teaching Experience

Forty-four percent of those who received notices had five or more years of previous teaching experience while 17.5 percent were in their first year of employment as teachers. Fifty-two percent were completing their first year as an employee of the district that RIFFED them.

Number of Times RIFFED/Tenure Status

Sixty-two percent of those studied had been RIFFED more than once by the district where they were employed. An additional 13% had been RIFFED at least once previously by another district. At least five RIF notices had been received by 6.3% of those studied. Tenure was held by 13.4% of those who received RIF notices.

Types of Positions Held by Notice Recipients

Regular classroom teachers made up 72% of the RIFFED population. Eleven percent were special education teachers and 17% held assignments as reading specialists, counselors, psychologists and administrators.

Income-Dependent Status

Single wage earners without dependents made up 29.6% of those who were RIFFED. Half of the males and one-fourth of the females in the study were members of this group.

Sixty percent of the educators studied indicated that they were married. Only 5% of the married educators reported that their salaries were their family's only source of income. One-fifth of the males reported that their wives had incomes that were larger than theirs.

Holding Second Jobs

Second jobs were held by 45.5% of the male educators and 18.8% of the females. Forty-three percent of those who held second jobs were devoting 20 hours or more per week to these jobs.

Employment During the Year Following the RIF

Eighty-six percent of those who received notices reported that they were rehired by the district that RIFFED them by October 1st of the same year. Positions were secured in other school districts by 4.3% of those who received notices. Employment in a field outside professional educators was listed by 3.2%. An additional 3.2% reported that they were unemployed,

Date of Rehire and Type of Assignment after Rehire

Seventy-seven percent of those who were rehired were notified after August 15th that they would be offered a contract. Nearly half of this 77% received their contracts between August 15th and the day before school started. Thirty-one percent were rehired during the first few

weeks of the new school year.

Over 41% of those who were rehired were assigned to the same grade level in the same building where they had taught during the previous year. Many returned to same room in the building where their class had been located the previous year. Another 11.6% were assigned to teach at another grade level in the same building. Reassignment to teach at the same grade level or in the same specialty area in another building in the same district was experienced by 17% of the teachers. The remaining 30% were moved to another type or program such as from regular to special education or from administration to teaching.

Satisfaction with Career Choice

A high level of satisfaction with the choice of professional education as a career was expressed by 19.3% of the educators who had been RIFFED. Another 22.9% stated that they were satisfied with their career choice while 36.4% reported they had mixed feelings. Dissatification was expressed by 17.9%. The remaining 3.6% indicated that they were highly dissatisfied with their careers in education.

Thirty percent of those who had received notices reported that they would select a career in education again if they were starting over while 41% indicated that they would not. The remaining 29% reported they were undecided.

Rank of Stress Factors

A ranking of stress factors by educators who had been RIFFED is shown in Table II. The mean for a factor would be 5.0 if all of the

respondents stated that they "strongly agreed" with the suggestion that the factor listed is a source of high stress for them. The mean would be 1.0 if they all strongly disagreed with the suggestion that the factor is a source of high stress. The rank and mean for each factor for those who had been RIFFED appears in columns one and two. A word or phrase which describes these stress factors appear in column six.

Insert Table II at about this point

The rank of these factors and their accompanying means from a study of 273 educators who had not been RIFFED during the previous spring are shown in columns three and four of Table II. An indication of the level of statistical significance between the means on these factors for the RIFFED and NOT RIFFED groups appears in column five. The movement of factors related to job security, board of education support, and lack of control over own life/future from low to high rankings among the RIFFED group suggests that a major change of emphasis and perspective follows the receipt of a RIF notice. "Lack of job security" was rated as the most stress producing factor by those who had been RIFFED while it was ranked 30th among the 38 factors by those who had not been RIFFED. The t value of 56 obtained when the means for the RIFFED and not RIFFED groups were compared far exceeded the $t = 2.59$ required for a .01 significance level on this factor. "Lack of board of education support" was ranked second by the RIFFED group and 15th by those who had not been RIFFED. RIFFED

persons ranked "Lack of control over own "life/future" seventh while employees who had not been RIFFED ranked this factor 25th.

The suggestion that receipt of a RIF notice brings about a major change of emphasis is supported by the finding that stress levels reported by those who had been RIFFED was significantly lower on five factors (paperwork, committee assignments, interpersonal relationships with students, time required for further academic preparation and lack of intellectual stimulation) than those reported by employees who had not been RIFFED. This difference is particularly noticeable in regard to the level of stress associated with "paperwork" and "time required for further academic preparation." The amount of paperwork that had to be handled probably did not change significantly when the RIF notices were distributed. The finding that those who had not been RIFFED viewed "time required for further academic preparation" to be significantly more stressful is in direct opposition to the expectation that many of those who had been RIFFED will find that it is necessary to return to school while returning is optional for the others.

Open Ended Responses

A section for open ended responses was provided at the end of the questionnaire. The following quotes from this section of the questionnaire are representative of these responses.

> "For the past 7 years I have had five different grade level assignments in 3 different schools. ...Every year April through August is an unsettling time of unrest, preparation periods being used for desperate

calls to Personnel, listening to stories of the "under the table" shuffling of teachers, seeing many friends and excellent teachers suffering and trying to Hang in There!!"

"At this point it's driving me nuts. I don't know whether to seek another position or wait for this cock-eyed district to give me word. As an educator I feel terribly disappointed."

"I taught for thirty years before coming to Arizona...I've been RIFFED twice. I'm beginning to hate education. I'm not treated as a professional in _____."

"There are times when I find it impossible to go to work. I begin to think, why bother? Nothing I do is appreciated or rewarded."

"I love my kids and my job. It's the best thing I've every done with my life. In the meantime, I'll file for unemployment and soak the district for every penny I can get."

"The RIF procedure is inhuman and unprofessional. My main complaint is that I feel used and powerless."

"I'll never believe that the District is incapable of gathering sound management data for decisions so vital."

"The RIF letters have reduced my feeling of being a professional. I am treated with less respect than during the many years I spent as a waitress."

"The feeling that I have little control over my life leaves me depressed and angry."

"I am sick and tired of this district treating teachers as they have been. I cannot stand the emotional trauma of waiting around all summer to be rehired. I'm sorry to have waisted my money and energy getting a teaching degree for nothing."

"After being RIFFED three years in a row, I find myself wondering what I owe my district."

"A positive attitude and lots of prayer has gotten me through the year! But I'm glad it's about over."

Discussion

Examination of characteristics of the RIFFED population indicates that females received 82% of the notices. One-fourth of these educators

were over age 40. In many cases they were experienced teachers who were returning to work after a number of years of absence to care for their own young children or experienced teachers who had been tenured in other parts of the country before moving to Arizona with husbands who had been transferred by their employers. These findings suggest the impact of the RIF process in education falls heavily on the female portion of an area's total workforce.

The finding that 45% of those who received notices had five or more years of prior teaching experience and that 59% were age 30 or older suggests that being RIFFED is not limited to young, inexperienced teachers who have recently graduated from college. The finding that 62% of those who received RIF notices had been RIFFED at least once before suggests it is a recurring experience for many educators.

Combination of the finding that 13% of those who were RIFFED had been RIFFED previously by another district and the finding that 51% of those who received notices were first year teachers in the district that RIFFED them suggests that seeking a position in another district after being RIFFED will probably insure that you will be RIFFED again next year. Waiting to see if you would be rehired was complicated by the fact that 77% of those who were rehired did not receive word of the district's intention to offer them a contract until after August 15. The report that 41% of those who were rehired were assigned to the same grade level or subject at the same school also makes one wonder about the management strategies involved in the decisions to RIF the employee.

The finding that 45% of the males and 19% of the females held second jobs to supplement their income as educators suggests that many of those

who received notices were probably not financially prepared for a period of unemployment. The report that 43% of those who held second jobs were devoting 20 hours or more a week to these positions raises serious questions about the availability of time for these educators to grade papers and make preparation for the next day's classes. Even so the "delivery of instruction" and "preparation for classes", were listed as low sources of stress.

A major shift in educators' focus and perspective followed the receipt of RIF notices. Factors such as "paperwork," "time required for further academic preparation," "committee assignments," "interpersonal relationships with students" and "lack of intellectual stimulation" were suddenly viewed as significantly less stress producing. Factors like "lack of job security," "lack of board of education support," "lack of control over own life/future" which were viewed by the not RIFFED group as low stress producers were viewed as significant sources of stress by those who had been RIFFED.

The devastating effect of a RIF on the lives of educators was apparent in the open ended response section of the questionnaire. Feelings of dehumanization, not being appreciated, valued, respected or dealt with in a professional manner were evident in these responses. The findings of this study leave little doubt that RIF's in a profession such as education, where employees have traditionally agreed to accept low salaries, in part, as a trade off for job security, has a devastating and potentially long lasting effect on those who receive notices.

Those who are involved in deciding if RIF notices will be issued

need to add the personal-professional effect the notices will have on the recipients to the factors they consider. This is particularly so in view of the finding that 86% of those who received notices in April were forced to live in a state of limbo until they were rehired by the same districts after mid-August. Further study is needed to identify strategies that will help reduce the 86% error that occured when those in the population that was studied were sent RIF notices.

Table I

Major Emphases of Articles Discussing RIFFING of Educators

Author/Year	Legality	How to carry out a RIF	Effect on Person being RIFFED
Bargerstock & Zirkel, 1980	X	X	
Bender, 1980	X	X	
Carr, 1980	X	X	
Corman, 1979		X	
Divoky,1979		X	X
Fowler, 1980		X	
Johnson, 1980		X	
Kudlaty, 1980		X	
Mastoraki, 1978			X
Norland, 1982	X		
Oregon, 1977	X	X	
Oregon, 1981	X	X	
Phay, 1980	X		
Phay, 1981	X		
Randall, 1979	X	X	
Seifert, 1977		X	X
Stanley, 1979		X	
Thomas, 1977		X	
Zirkel & Bargerstock, 1980	X	X	

Table II

Ranking of Stress Factors by Educators Who Had Been RIFFED and Those Who Had Not Been RIFFED

RIFFED Rank	RIFFED Mean	Not RIFFED Rank	Not RIFFED Mean	Sig Level	Rank of Stress Factors by RIFFED Educators
1.	4.58	30.	2.53	.01	Lack of job security
2.	3.84	15.	3.08	.01	Lack of board of education support
3.	3.77	2.	3.93	N.S.	Discipline/behavior problems
4.	3.61	1.	4.18	.01	Paperwork
5.	3.59	3.	3.92	N.S.	Procedural red tape
6.	3.55	4.	3.84	N.S.	Disinterested parents
7.	3.50	25.	2.73	.01	Lack of control over life/future
8.	3.37	11.	3.22	N.S.	Responsibility without authority
9.	3.33	5.	3.51	N.S.	Fatigue
9.	3.33	8.	3.34	N.S.	Lack of rewards for work done
10.	3.30	14.	3.10	N.S.	Overcrowded classrooms
11.	3.27	21.	2.92	N.S.	Personal financial problems
12.	3.23	6.	3.41	N.S.	Pressures from district hierarchy
13.	3.19	7.	3.35	.01	Time required for further academic preparation
14.	3.12	24.	2.82	N.S.	Lack of materials and equipment
15.	3.11	23.	2.83	N.S.	Ineffective teacher organizations
16.	3.00	19.	2.96	N.S.	Lack of administrative support
16.	3.00	26.	2.69	N.S.	Lack of respect from students
17.	2.99	9.	3.32	N.S.	Lack of time for professional

Table II (continued)

RIFFED Rank	RIFFED Mean	Not RIFFED Rank	Not RIFFED Mean	Sig Level	Rank of Stress Factors by RIFFED Educators
18.	2.88	13.	3.17	N.S.	Hostile/aggressive students
19.	2.84	11.	3.21	N.S.	Playground and lunch duty
19.	2.84	24.	2.82	N.S.	Mainstreamed students
20.	2.83	22.	2.90	N.S.	Family responsibilities
21.	2.79	18.	2.99	N.S.	Preparation for class
22.	2.78	14.	3.12	N.S.	Lack of breaks and preparation time
23.	2.76	32.	2.36	N.S.	Interpersonal relationship with district administration
24.	2.65	10.	3.27	.01	Committee assignments
25.	2.63	28.	2.61	N.S.	Possibility of law suits
26.	2.56	18.	2.99	.05	Interpersonal relationship with students
27.	2.42	33.	2.83	.05	Lack of intellectual stimulation
28.	2.41	20	2.93	N.S.	Interpersonal relationship with teachers
29.	2.40	31.	2.40	N.S.	Problems with own children
30.	2.38	27.	2.67	N.S.	Delivery of instruction
31.	2.28	33.	2.33	N.S.	Marital problems
32.	2.23	29.	2.55	N.S.	Personal health problems
33.	2.21	34.	2.29	N.S.	Competition with colleagues
34.	2.02	33.	2.36	N.S.	Boredom

Average means

RIFFED population = 2.97

Not RIFFED = 3.01

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